

VZCZCXRO9413
PP RUEHCN RUEHGH RUEHVC
DE RUEHIN #0966/01 2230955
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 110955Z AUG 09 ZDK
FM AIT TAIPEI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2090
INFO RUEHOO/CHINA POSTS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK PRIORITY 4663
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 0150
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RHHJJAA/JICPAC HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUCPDOG/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TAIPEI 000966

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE ALSO FOR EAP/TC AND CA/OCS, BANGKOK FOR USAID/OFDA
REGIONAL ADVISOR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/11/2019

TAGS: [ECON](#) [AEMR](#) [CASC](#) [PGOV](#) [SENV](#) [XE](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: DEATH TOLL FROM TYPHOON MORAKOT RISES, RESCUE
EFFORTS CONTINUING

REF: TAIPEI 958

TAIPEI 00000966 001.2 OF 003

Classified By: Acting Director Robert S. Wang for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. The death toll and damages caused by Typhoon Morakot continue to rise as rescue workers fan out across central and southern Taiwan to ascertain the typhoon's full impact. Penetration into remote areas by rescuers, including members of the Ministry of National Defense's "special battle squad," is revealing serious damage to roads and large-scale mudslide and flooding damage. While the official death toll is at 41, unofficial numbers are more than ten times as high. Economic damage, primarily to the agricultural sector, is more than double what was reported only 24 hours ago, and might shave nearly half a percentage point from Taiwan's third-quarter GDP numbers. AIT is preparing a Disaster Declaration Cable (septel) to request U.S. assistance for Taiwan's rescue and recovery efforts. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Search and rescue efforts continue in central and southern Taiwan in the aftermath of Typhoon Morakot, where authorities are discovering that the damage left in the typhoon's wake is more extensive than originally feared. The official death toll has been revised upwards to 41 persons as of the afternoon of August 11. Officially, 62 individuals are reported missing and 35 injured. However, as rescue efforts reach into more remote parts of the island, the unofficial count of dead, missing, and injured continues to rise. For instance, in the most notable case so far, media reports that upwards of 400 people are missing and presumed dead in a mudslide that destroyed the village of Xiaolin in Kaohsiung County. AIT contacts at the Taiwan Emergency Operations Center (EOC) tell us that as of August 10, 61 villagers in Xiaolin were rescued and 150 were known to be safe. Although the village has an official population of 1,313, the EOC will not speculate as to the fate of the unaccounted, but notes that many of them were likely not in the village at the time of the typhoon. An official report on the situation in Xiaolin will depend on local rescue conditions and the EOC cannot say when such a report might be forthcoming. AIT/CONS has confirmed with disaster management

authorities that there are no official reports of American citizen victims. Two Amcits earlier reported missing in Kaohsiung by a family member have been located, and AIT/K has offered assistance as needed.

13. (C) In an August 10 meeting with the Acting Director, Deputy National Security Advisor Ho Sze-yin compared the situation in southern Taiwan to New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. As with Katrina, initial estimates of damages caused by the storm appeared to be overly optimistic. As rescue crews and news organizations reach the scene, however, the extent of the disaster is becoming clearer. Rainfall amounts high even by Taiwan typhoon season standards (in some places, more than two meters of rain in two days), exacerbated by several months of near-drought conditions that left soil packed and impermeable to water, resulted in landslide that wiped out roads, bridges and even, according to initial reports, entire villages. As with Katrina, Ho commented, Typhoon Morakot revealed weaknesses in Taiwan's disaster response system. For example, he said, local authorities in one township complained about the military's delay in dispatching rescue crews to aid in an evacuation. In fact, the military had, as requested, dispatched trucks to the village within ten minutes of receiving the request. When the trucks arrived at the area, however, they discovered that the road into the town had been cut off by the flooding, resulting in a delay as inflatable boats were brought in.

14. (SBU) AIT's Kaohsiung branch also noted that the initial lack of inflatable boats hindered rescue efforts and the delivery of food and supplies in the first two days after the typhoon hit. Roughly 1 million households do not have access to potable water, and access may not be restored for 7 days,

TAIPEI 00000966 002.2 OF 003

according to the Ministry of Economic Affairs. Power has been restored in some areas, but over 60,000 households are still without electricity. AIT Kaohsiung reported that typhoon damage has cut off communications to at least three villages in Kaohsiung County. According to official data, a total of 10,330 individuals were evacuated from their homes and sent to stay temporarily in 138 shelters.

15. (SBU) The number of damaged roads reported has been increased to 130, but 1 national expressway and 15 provincial highways have been cleared and repaired. So far 14 bridges have collapsed and 54 others have been closed. This is Taiwan's worst bridge damage in 10 years, even worse than the September 21, 1999 Chi-Chi earthquake, according to Director of National Central University's Bridge Engineering Research Center Yao Nai-chia. At least 17 river banks and 1 sea bank are currently under repair. All ports and airfields outside of Pingtung are open.

Relief and Assistance

16. (SBU) In terms of relief efforts, Taiwan's Executive Yuan has appropriated USD 91 million for a reconstruction fund for typhoon victims, which will offer low interest loans and funding for home repair. Private donations are also coming in, with Cathay Financial Co. and BenQ Corporation together donating nearly USD 3 million for rescue efforts. Two visiting delegations from China each donated nearly USD 150,000 (one delegation is from China UnionPay Co., visiting Taiwan to sign an agreement allowing Chinese visitors to the island to use bank cards issued by China UnionPay, the other delegation is headed by Fujian Province Deputy Governor Chen Hua, visiting Taiwan to promote cross-strait economic and cultural links between Fujian and Taiwan).

17. (SBU) Estimates of economic losses from Morakot continue to grow, with financial services company SinoPac Holdings estimating that typhoon-related losses may deduct up to 0.53 percentage points from GDP growth for the third quarter, or

0.13 percentage points for 2009 (meaning, in dollar terms, SinoPac estimates losses stemming from Morakot will reach roughly USD 457 million). 600 firms listed on the Taiwan Stock Exchange yesterday reported approximately USD 6 million in typhoon-related losses. The agricultural sector remains the hardest hit, with losses mounting to USD 154 million (twice what was reported yesterday in reftel).

18. (SBU) Vice Foreign Minister Andrew Hsia confirmed to AIT that Taiwan would welcome U.S. assistance, as it has also done for a 10 million yen (roughly USD 100,000) contribution from Japan. Based on consultation with USAID Bangkok, AIT is sending a Declaration of Disaster cable (septel) requesting USD 250,000 to assist Taiwan with relief and rescue efforts. USAID Bangkok noted Taiwan's substantial assistance to the U.S. during Hurricane Katrina.

Politics on Hold...Partially

19. (SBU) Taiwan's main political parties are putting activities on hold to focus on relief efforts, and criticism of Ma administration's lack of preparedness and slow reaction remains pervasive. KMT Chairman Wu Po-hsiung announced that the party would postpone the election of its Central Committee members from August 16 to August 22, explaining that rescue efforts are the party's top concern. The DPP has postponed its regularly scheduled Wednesday Central Executive Committee meeting to next week to allow members to help out with relief efforts. Both parties have set up special bank accounts to collect donations.

110. (SBU) The KMT Legislative Yuan held a press conference on August 10 to urge President Ma to issue an emergency

TAIPEI 00000966 003.2 OF 003

decree to facilitate the mobilization of public and private resources for post-typhoon reconstruction work and relief efforts. In response, the Presidential Office spokesman Wang Yu-chi explained that Taiwan's Executive Yuan is responsible for making decisions on rescue and reconstruction efforts and noted that Ma, for now, does not judge an emergency decree necessary. Premier Liu Chao-shiuan, meanwhile, criticized the Kaohsiung County government for not evacuating residents of mudslide-affected areas earlier, thereby preventing casualty losses. Liu said the local government did not act in a timely matter because County Magistrate Yang Chiu-hsing (DPP) was on an overseas trip. Yang cut short his visit to Europe and returned on August 9 and said he decided against canceling his trip because the Central Weather Bureau had predicted the typhoon would mainly hit northern Taiwan. Politicians and residents alike will likely continue to point the blame in different directions and in the end some local and maybe even central officials will likely volunteer or be forced to resign.

WANG